



**Michelle Feldman**  
**Women's Community Justice Association**  
**Board of Corrections Testimony**  
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My name is Michelle Feldman and I am the Policy and Campaigns Director for Women's Community Justice Association. We advocate for the women and gender-expansive people at the Rose M. Singer Center on Rikers Island.

First, we want to urge the board not to approve the variance for GRVC. No one should not be denied their 14 hours out of cell time. This proposal would be extremely harmful to incarcerated people. Locking people in one of the most restrictive settings for that long is inhumane. Instead, we need an end to solitary confinement once and for all with Intro 549.

Second, the city needs to ramp up decarceration efforts and it should start with the women and gender-expansive people at Rosie's. The current population is 337, a year ago it was 233. This is moving in the wrong direction.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and the city should focus on decarcerating those who are victims of domestic violence. The *Path to Under 100* report that WCJA wrote with the Lippman Commission found that up to 93% of women that have been diverted from Rikers had suffered from physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse. Nationally, an estimated 77% of women in jail have experienced intimate partner abuse.

It should start with stronger preventative services that help survivors of domestic violence avoid criminal legal contact in the first place. That includes access to physical and mental health care, legal services, and affordable housing. The city needs accessible, community-based domestic violence education and services that help women and gender-expansive people heal from trauma.

There should also be an initiative to get domestic violence survivors off Rikers. One strategy is holistic screening for abuse and other factors like mental illness and substance use disorder by peer specialists with lived experience. These factors should be considered at every stage in the case by judges, district attorneys, defense attorneys, DOC and others.

In 2019, New York passed the Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act, which has judges take into account a history of abuse when determining sentencing. Having domestic violence considered earlier in the case, including for bail and charging decisions, would help to get more survivors off of Rikers more quickly.

Finally, there should be better access to programs like SHERO, which has diverted over 300 women and gender-expansive people from Rikers since it launched in 2017. It costs \$60,000 to \$70,000 annually for a program slot at SHERO, compared with \$550,000 to incarcerate someone at Rikers.

With 16 deaths this year on Rikers, there is an urgent need to decarcerate now. New York City must do more to protect and support domestic violence survivors whose trauma and experiences leads them to Rikers Island. Strong community-based resources that prevent incarceration and a focused effort to more quickly divert those at Rikers into alternatives would improve safety and justice.